

10. EMERGING ECONOMIES AND THE NEED FOR RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION CURRICULUM: NIGERIA'S PERSPECTIVE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

There are various global emerging issues such as flooding, desertification, global warming, hunger, disease, high unemployment, cybercrime etc. Every country or region has one problem or another to contain with. However, Nigeria as a nation has more than a challenge and perhaps the worst for her is unemployment that partly breeds hunger and insecurity. The unemployment is blamed on our current education system. Our education system, a product of defective curriculum inherited from the British colonial authority seen as Eurocentric has punctured our growth and development in many ways. The Eurocentric curriculum was to prepare people for white collar jobs. Today, the contemporary global market economy requires every nation to be part of the market by contributing its products and receiving from others in form of goods and services. Unfortunately, Nigeria cannot seriously be part of the new system, because curriculum then encouraged non-skills or what popularly referred to as 'grammar' education. Hence, even before Nigeria's independence, graduates from different educational strata were produced and are still being produced mainly for white collar jobs. But the system has created a lot of challenges where our graduates appear no longer relevant in today's economy, and by extension unemployable. Against this background it has become necessary to restructure the school curriculum to prepare our youths for the new wave of global development. The new curriculum would take into consideration the needs of individuals and the wider society, skills acquisition either in the vocational or technical would be appreciated for if public or private sectors would not employ graduates, individuals would create jobs for themselves and could as well become employers of labour. The curriculum requires restructuring from primary to tertiary levels with emphasis on vocational and technical skills. The paper uses historical and multidisciplinary approaches as methodology.

Keywords: Education, Curriculum, Skill Development, Unemployment, Globalization, Restructuring.

Introduction

The world is changing in almost all perspectives of human pursuit and to eke a living for sustainable development in different regions and continents, this change is inelastic. However, towards the end of the 20th century, a new global market economy driven by advancement in science and technology, information and communication technology (ICT) etc., popularly referred to as digital economy emerged. It is a market system that is compulsory for every nation to be part either through production, distribution or consumption or all of the above indices of market exchange productions/relations. Unfortunately, Nigeria is part of the global economy but a consumer of goods and services from the West and Asia because she has very little to export. Nigeria's export is mainly crude oil which the market price is determined by the buyers - the Western and Eastern nations. On the other hand, Nigeria is a major importer of capital goods, food, arms etc. and always on market deficit to her trading partners.

However, for a long time now, when issue of unemployment is discussed at any forum, what is usually expressed is that Nigerian graduates are not employable because they lack skills needed in today's market economy. That is so because of the changes in the global market that has surpassed the type of education received in Nigeria that prepares individuals for the future. Nigeria needs an entrepreneurial education for the youths. Indeed, Nigeria is in this predicament because of the Eurocentric education bequeathed to her by Britain, her erstwhile colonial authority. The type of education received from them and maintained after they had left place the country on a disadvantaged position among comity of nations. In this connection, many youths and more so graduates from secondary to tertiary institutions are not employable because they do not possess the skills needed in today's market economy. It is against this background that it has become necessary to restructure Nigeria's education curriculum to reflect the realities of modern market system. It means Nigeria needs entrepreneurial education (incorporating technical and vocational information, communication and technology-based disciplines) as the basic component of education from primary school to the tertiary level. Nonetheless, that would lay emphasis on the teaching of science, technology, mathematics, ICT as an integral part of education. This, however, does not mean that liberal education disciplines would be excluded from the curriculum. In other words, Nigerian education system would be comprehensive but with more emphasis on skill-oriented disciplines.

Along this line, it is imperative that Nigeria launches herself in the teaching of science, technology, mathematics, ICT, and teacher-education. It means, teachers need to be recruited, trained and retrained for those who had been in the system, if the nation must succeed in this new development. From this perspective, the new curriculum would become a nucleus for Nigerian children from primary to tertiary institutions – acquiring skills that would be useful to them and the nation as a whole and by extension preparing graduates that would become employable for the future. The country would key into productive ventures, not only being a consuming economy but also a productive one. It means that with basic digital education, if any individual is not employed, one could employ himself/herself. All these would lead to sustainable development in an emerging economy such as ours.

Emerging Economy

The term “emerging economy” was first coined by Antonio Van Agtmael in 1981 to differentiate it from the touting phrase “third world” which suggested progress, uplift, and dynamism (Akpan, 2021). An emerging economy is explained as a situation in which a traditionally agricultural exporter frog-leap into major industrial centre with foreign firms investing in productive plants in the country thus, facilitating the movement of peasants from the countryside into new urban jobs. It means an economy where millions of ordinary people

begin to emerge from desperate poverty into, at least, the beginning of a decent life, and where some people are becoming very rich (Akpan, 2021). It also entails the production and expansion of goods and services beyond the domestic market through private or non-governmental actors, eliminating (or at least minimizing) government interference linking her market beyond regional to international levels. It means liberalization of production, distribution of goods and services beyond the domestic market thus leading to job/wealth creation (Akpan, 2021). It also describes an economy which progressively moves from a weak industrial or subsistence level to a more advanced level economic development with a dynamic and sustainable industrial sector having close links with advanced market economies in finance and investment system (Akpan, 2021).

Curriculum/Curriculum Restructuring

Curriculum means very many things to recipients of school education. It may be seen by some as all the learning experiences that the learner acquired under the guidance of schools, directed towards acquiring some skills or competences. This concept is learner-focused rather than teaching and its inclusion of all experiences of the learners (NTI, nd). Hass (1980) sees curriculum as all the experiences that individual learners have in a programme of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives which is planned in terms of a frame work of theory and research or past or present professional practice. Curriculum restructuring implies reorganization of the curriculum to cater for the need of the learners and by extension the needs of the society at present and for the future.

Understanding Sustainable Development

It is important to note that the 1970s saw the beginning of international summits on environmental and also a proliferation of international agreements on environmental issues. According to the United Nations Environment programme (established in 1972), there are 144 regional and 97 global environmental agreements relating to the environment, more than three-quarters of which were signed after 1972. The first global environment summit was the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm in 1972. It initiated a number of intergovernmental investigations, meetings and agreements on global environmental problems. These merged with parallel investigations into development and common security, and culminated in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 with the theme 'Our Common Future'. The World Commission on Environment Report popularized the term 'sustainable development', and it introduced the term 'environmental security' (Collins 2007).

Sustainable development has, therefore, been defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs (Bruthland Report 1987). It is therefore a concept involving the utilization of available natural resources, the preservation of genetic diversity, and the maintenance of the ecosystem. The Bruthland report view of sustainable development implies that future generation should be compensated for the damage caused by the present-day activities for development to be sustainable. For development to be sustainable, it is necessary to sustain the ecosystem and strengthen the social and economic fabric that underscores development (Torado & Smith 2009; Egwu 2008).

History and Development of Vocational/Technical Education

The foundation of Nigeria's education was laid by the early missionaries and the colonial government, but the era of self-determination in education by Nigerians spanned

between 1951 and 1970. The 1951 era of education became important since it was the beginning of internal self-government by Nigerians (Fafunwa, 1977). According to Fafunwa, “one of the major defects in the Nigerian educational system is the low priority accorded technical and vocational education. The British colonial education was conceived and promoted as purely literary education for the civil service. Literary education became a symbol of prestige in Nigeria, and by contrast, technology, agriculture and other practical subjects particularly of the sub-professional level, did not receive wide acceptability or esteem. It was the case that, any training for qualification outside degrees, especially in technology was unpopular” (Fafunwa, 1977; Ukeje, 1978).

Indeed, Indigenous Technical and Vocational Education was in vogue before Western education in Nigeria. Indigenous system of education taught various skills to Nigerian children including weaving, blacksmithing, carving, fishing, hair plaiting, leather working, pottery making, glass and bead-working, dyeing, tinkering, catering, cattle rearing and so on. It was expected that Western education would be built on the existing skill of the people and institutionalized for the growth of this sector. That was not to be, at least when Western education began (Akpan, 2013).

Level of Nigeria’s Industrial Progress in the 21st Century

Nigeria’s industrialization pendulum is swinging towards the negative rather than positive. This is translated through the level of manufacturing, whether of large- or small-scale industries. By illustration, between 1960 and 1970 the manufacturing sector contribution to the economy was between 4.4 percent and rose to 11.4 percent in 1981. This expansion was as a result of tariff manipulations which encouraged the expansion of assembly activities which was high import dependent, which kept away indigenous people out of, and in the long run reduced industrial growth (Akpan, 2013). Today, it has declined to as low as 4 percent.

Prognosis of Technical and Vocational Education

Vocational education and training “prepare learners for careers that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific occupation or vocation”. In other words, it is an “education designed to develop occupational skills”. Vocational and technical education give individuals the skills to live, learn and work as productive citizens in a global society.” In general, therefore, education sharpens the mind, opens the way for something worthwhile. It is the nucleus or epicenter in which other aspects of development radiate. In this connection, vocational education offers:

- (a) A wide range of artisanal specialized employable functions such as auto mechanic, sheet metal work, electricity, painting and decorating, blacksmithing, welding, woodwork, masonry, carpentry, generator repairing, plumbing, tiling and so on.
- (b) It also provides equally wide range of activities in agriculture. There are quite a number of agricultural activities for employment creation that are sustainable, for example, crop and horticulture, snail farming, piggery, fish farming, poultry farming, vegetables, goat herding and rabbit keeping (Akpan, 2014).

Other vocational areas include but not limited to dress making, leather working, bead-working, barbering, carving (wood and bronze), sculpturing, catering, pottery and ceramics, blacksmithing and goldsmithing (Akpan, 2014).

However, it is necessary to add here that agriculture or farming have since been abandoned by the youths and graduates from tertiary institutions. They see agriculture as the function for the aged, illiterates and poor people in the rural areas. They view it with disdain because of its nature. Agreed, the age of crude farming is over with modern technology

expanding. Though not recommendation as such, the youths and young graduates need to form themselves into cooperative societies and seek assistance from government, donor agencies and banks for loans to enable them acquire modern farming implements that would enhance productivity and reduce fatigue/labour. They should also as a society request from government a land to expand their farms for increased yields and by extension be provided with the improved seedlings (in case of crops) and new breed in the area of birds and animals. They too would become employers of labour (Akpan 2014).

On the other hand, it was expected that technical/vocational education would have laid the foundation for industrial take-off if the policies were strictly implemented. This is so because even in the era of industrial revolution in Europe, most inventors did not have formal education. For instance, Michael Faraday, the man who discovered electricity did not discover it through a formal school setting. Most inventions were individually made possible (Buah 1969). Besides, the greatness of Asian tigers today came through skill acquisition translated into small and medium scale industries. Secondly, it was also expected that the skills acquired by the products of these technical and vocational schools would prepare them for self-employed. By that, pressure on the formal sector for jobs would have been reduced minimally. However, the large pool of employable individuals in the informal sector of the Nigerian economy would be an added advantage to the economy because employment has a linkage effect on the growth of economies. This is an area that would propel Nigeria to belong to the group of sustainable economies of the 21st century.

The New Market Economy

Towards the dawn of the 20th century a new market economy driven by globalization emerged. This market opened the door for every nation to be a part of it – that is, every nation must be a participant and by extension contributor as well as receiver of the products of the market. However, emerging economies are commodity-export nations while the developed economies are industrial export nations. The prices of these products are not the same. The imports from the industrial to the emerging nations are always high and composite in demand, while exports from the emerging economies are always cheap and on give-away prices. It would appear that the commodities from emerging economies are usually determined by the buyers – developed economies. In whichever way, the emerging nations are always on the deficit. The market gain is usually swinging to the advantage of the developed states.

Challenges of the New Market Economy

The challenge of the current global market economy is predicated on the utilization of science and technology as a tool for the production of goods and services for internal as well as international markets. Production of tangible goods depend on the acquisition of skills and the transfer of such skills to develop a market economy that would be beneficial for internal growth through provision of employment to youths and for external use, through foreign exchange and reduced dependence on foreign nations. However, since the present century is built on the past, how is Nigeria preparing to meet the future challenges? Is it possible that Nigeria would be part of the international project to meet the new demand for the new world order? Or, now that Nigeria is making efforts to belong to the league of 20 most developed economies, would that be achieved at the present scenario (Akpan 2013).

Restructuring/New Curriculum Contents

There is not much to be restructured in the primary level of education. The focus for restructuring should be on the secondary and post-secondary levels. Though this aspect was

suggested by Babs Fufunwa and B. Onyerisara Ukeje as early as 1960s and 70s, a lot of parents and government still place emphasis on grammar education.

However, in the secondary school level both liberal and skills related subjects should be included in the curriculum. For instance, subjects such as English Language, Mathematics, Literature, Religious/Islamic Studies, History, Local geography, local language at least to JSS3. In senior secondary, subjects such as agricultural science, chemistry, physics, biology, art, woodwork, dressmaking, cookery, music, should be taught.

In a purely technical/vocational school, subjects such as mechanical engineering, technical-drawing, surveying, poultry and ceramics, plumbing, electrical installation, carpentry, fabrication, information and communication technology (ICT) need to be incorporated. Emphasis should be laid on ICT. It would be important to also include other skills-related disciplines as well for individuals to have a wider choice to make.

Conclusion

Nigeria is one of the emerging economies that wants to join the league of developed economies. She has what it takes to be a great nation but what draws her behind is the high population of unemployable youths. High population could help an emerging industrializing economy. Nigeria is fueling an explosive jobless rate of 33.3 percent and 55 percent in youth segment (The Punch, Jul 25, 2022). Her population is galloping, economic growth has slowed; and job creation are in reverse gear. All these scenarios are as a result of the Eurocentric education laid by colonial authorities, and after independence nothing was changed by the indigenous people. The new market economy driven by globalization requires every nation to be part-contributor and receiver. Nigeria is an enterprising economy though it is only receiving but not contributing to the global economy because her labour force lacks the needed skills for today's market. Her education system needs a serious restructuring to prepare her youths for the new market world order. It is hoped that if this is done, it would reduce unemployment, create a new and secure environment and upgrade Nigeria to a world economic player.

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